



May 18, 1999

Ms. Jennifer D. Soldano  
Associate General Counsel  
Texas Department of Transportation  
125 E. 11<sup>th</sup> Street  
Austin, Texas 78701-2483

OR99-1359

Dear Ms. Soldano:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 126078.

The Texas Department of Transportation (the “department”) received requests for “clippings of the pornographic literature that was placed on” an employee’s desk and records of an investigation concerning the requestor’s complaint. You contend that the requested information is excepted from public disclosure by section 552.103 of the Government Code. You also assert that the requested pornographic material is commercially available and is copyrighted. We have considered your arguments and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.103(a), the “litigation exception,” excepts from disclosure information relating to litigation to which the state or a political subdivision is or may be a party. The department has the burden of providing relevant facts and documents to show that the section 552.103(a) exception is applicable in a particular situation. The test for meeting this burden is a showing that (1) litigation is pending or reasonably anticipated, and (2) the information at issue is related to that litigation. *University of Tex. Law Sch. v. Texas Legal Found.*, 958 S.W.2d 479 (Tex. App.—Austin 1997, no pet.); *Heard v. Houston Post Co.*, 684 S.W.2d 210, 212 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 1984, writ ref’d n.r.e.); Open Records Decision No. 551 at 4 (1990). The department must meet both prongs of this test for information to be excepted under section 552.103(a).

The mere chance of litigation will not trigger section 552.103(a). Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986). To demonstrate that litigation is reasonably anticipated, the governmental body must furnish *concrete* evidence that litigation involving a specific matter is realistically contemplated and is more than mere conjecture. *Id.* Whether litigation is reasonably anticipated must be determined on a case-by-case basis. Open Records Decision No. 452 at 4 (1986).

You have submitted information to this office showing that the requestor has filed a complaint with the Texas Commission on Human Rights (the "TCHR") alleging discrimination. The TCHR operates as a federal deferral agency under section 706(c) of title VII, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-5. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ("EEOC") defers jurisdiction to the TCHR over complaints alleging employment discrimination. *Id.*

This office has stated that a pending EEOC complaint indicates litigation is reasonably anticipated. Open Records Decision Nos. 386 at 2 (1983), 336 at 1 (1982). By showing that the complaint filed with the TCHR is pending, you have shown that litigation is reasonably anticipated. Our review of the records at issue also shows that they are related to the anticipated litigation for purposes of section 552.103(a). Thus, you may withhold the requested information pursuant to section 552.103(a).

However, we note that if the opposing parties in the anticipated litigation have seen or had access to any of the information in these documents, there would be no justification for withholding that information pursuant to section 552.103(a). Open Records Decision Nos. 349 (1982), 320 (1982). Thus, information that has either been obtained from or provided to the opposing party in the litigation is not excepted from disclosure under section 552.103(a), and it must be disclosed. It appears that the opposing party has had access to the pornographic materials; therefore, you may not withhold this information under section 552.103. We also note that the applicability of section 552.103(a) ends when the litigation is concluded. Attorney General Opinion MW-575 at 2 (1982); Open Records Decision Nos. 350 at 3 (1982), 349 at 2 (1982).

You assert that the information is commercially available. Section 552.027 of the Government Code provides:

(a) A governmental body is not required under this chapter to allow the inspection of or to provide a copy of information *in a commercial book or publication purchased or acquired by the governmental body for research purposes* if the book or publication is commercially available to the public.

(b) Although information *in a book or publication* may be made available to the public as a resource material, such as a library book, a governmental body is not required to make a copy of the information in response to a request for public information.

(c) A governmental body shall allow the inspection of information *in a book or publication* that is made part of, incorporated into, or referred to in a rule or policy of a governmental body. [Emphasis added.]

This section is designed to alleviate the burden of providing copies of commercially available books, publications, and resource materials maintained by governmental bodies, such as telephone directories, dictionaries, encyclopedias, statutes, and periodicals. The legislative history of this provision notes that section 552.002 should exclude from the definition of public information

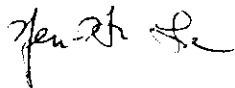
books and other materials that are also available as research tools elsewhere to any member of the public. Thus, although *public library books* are available for public use, the library staff will not be required to do research or make copies of books for members of the public.

INTERIM REPORT TO THE 74TH LEGISLATURE OF THE HOUSE STATE AFFAIRS COMM., 74th Leg., R.S., SUBCOMMITTEE ON OPEN RECORDS REVISIONS 9 (1994) (emphasis added). Therefore, section 552.027 excludes commercially available research material from the definition of "public information." The pornographic material is not "a commercial book or publication purchased or acquired by the [department] for research purposes." Accordingly, we do not believe that the requested pornographic material is the kind of information covered by section 552.027.

Finally, you contend that the information is copyrighted. A custodian of public records must comply with the copyright law and is not required to furnish copies of records that are copyrighted. Attorney General Opinion JM-672 (1987). A governmental body must allow inspection of copyrighted materials unless an exception applies to the information. *Id.* If a member of the public wishes to make copies of copyrighted materials, the person must do so unassisted by the governmental body. In making copies, the member of the public assumes the duty of compliance with the copyright law and the risk of a copyright infringement suit. *See* Open Records Decision No. 550 (1990).

We are resolving this matter with an informal letter ruling rather than with a published open records decision. This ruling is limited to the particular records at issue under the facts presented to us in this request and should not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records. If you have questions about this ruling, please contact our office.

Sincerely,



Yen-Ha Le  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

YHL/nc

Ref.: ID# 126078

encl.: Submitted documents

cc: Ms. Sandra S. York  
1061 North Crockett  
San Benito, Texas 78586  
(w/o enclosures)